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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: DEAL STRUCK TO PUSH BACK BY-ELECTIONS

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Parliamentary minority faction Christian Democratic Movement (CDM) convinced the ruling United National Movement party (UNM) to postpone until 2010 by-elections in three single-mandate, majoritarian constituencies set for September 27. The by-elections will now be scheduled to coincide with already-scheduled municipal elections. The major benefit of the agreement will be that any new electoral law will be tested at both the parliamentary and local levels in advance of scheduled 2012 parliamentary elections. End Summary.

¶2. (C) CDM proposed moving the scheduled September 27 by-elections to be held simultaneously with local elections tentatively set for May 30, 2010. CDM faction leader MP Giorgi Targamadze told Poloff that an agreement was reached with UNM but that a minor amendment would have to be passed in Parliament to allow for holding the by-elections at the later date. Targamadze said simple common sense dictated holding all the elections at the same time. He hoped that next year's elections would prove to be a good test of the expected revised electoral code for use at both at the local and national level. In Targamadze's view, the added benefit of holding the parliamentary by-elections in concert with local elections was that it would provide incentive for more political parties to participate rather than simply boycott the by-elections now. Targamadze said that even if the three seats went to parties currently outside of Parliament, the political situation in Parliament would remain unchanged so it was of little political consequence to push back the election date.

¶3. (C) Targamadze went on to state that the agreement was a positive step representing how the parliamentary opposition plays a relevant role -- and this change highlighted the best way CDM could engage constructively. He said the CDM would continue to criticize the UNM's parliamentary initiatives where they disagreed but would also continue to make well reasoned, sound policy arguments and hope to convince the majority UNM of their value to find common ground where possible.

¶4. (C) A number of other opposition politicians, both inside and outside of parliament, disagreed with the CDM-UNM agreement to move the by-elections back. Opposition MP Peter Mamradze, allied with former PM Zurab Nogaideli, expressed frustration with the delay; he believed his party was well positioned to win additional seats in a September race. Other political leaders criticized the Government for the decision, arguing that it was not appropriate to change the law whenever it suited the Government's urpose.

¶5. (SBU) The change of date requires Parliament to pass a new amendment to current electoral law since by-elections are mandated to take place before November after they become vacant. Parliament is currently in extraordinary session to adopt the amendment to allow the delay. The by-elections are needed to fill seats representing Chugureti, Gurjaani and Ozurgeti. The Chugureti seat opened when Lasha Zhvania became the Minister of Economic Development in December.

Gurjaani's MP, Giorgi Gviniashvili, became Kakheti governor in September 2009. Anzor Erkomaishvili, MP for Ozurgeti, is a theater director by profession and quit the Parliament earlier this year.

TEFFT